



Photos by 1st Lt. Nicole Walters

Airman takes on demolition derby



Mighty 90 member takes 2nd place

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An Airman with the 90th Security Forces Squadron took second place at the Extreme Demolition Derby League National Championship in Greeley, Colo., Oct. 7.

"That was the highlight of my career so far," said Airman 1st Class Nate Dunham, who has been derbying for five years.

Demolition derbies started in the 1950s, and by the 1960s, were popular at county fairs. There are an estimated 2,500 derbies at fairs and stadiums each year in the United States, with more than one million people in attendance.

According to the Public Broadcasting Service and Amusement Business magazine, "Demolition derbies are currently the largest draw at county fairs, outside of top-name talent, and there are few if any empty seats in the grandstands."

The popularity of derbies is on the rise, and television is cashing in. Spike TV televised the XDDL championship, and ESPN will televise the Demolition Events Nation Tour Championship in Indiana in April 2006.

Airman Dunham, originally from Springfield, Ill., picked up the sport from his father Mike Dunham, who is his hero because Mr. Dunham's always accomplished what he sets out to do.

"He has been really supportive," said Airman Dunham. "He even helps me do the welding."

Airman Dunham has been in more than 20 derbies, and his wife, Jessica, is always in the stands. It's turned into a family affair now, with Airman Dunham's daughter, Emily, is also in the stands.

"She loves to go and watch," said Airman Dunham.

He currently has 11 cars ready to derby and wants to run the DENT Championship in

April. With a \$10,000 purse, the stakes are huge for Airman Dunham who would like to become sponsored by the Air Force.

His goal is to beat the national champion, Scott Bambauer.

"I beat him at Greeley, but technically he won because of points," said Airman Dunham.

Airman Dunham's co-workers have been supportive of his sport and goals.

"My superintendent, Master Sgt. Scott Scheffey, kept the car for a while," said Airman Dunham.

"He could be doing worse," joked Staff Sgt. Josh Woodard, 90th Security Forces Gate Guard Section and Airman Dunham's supervisor. "I don't want to ride with him though. It's a family deal. His wife video tapes it, and we all watch them. It's a good thing for him."

The smell of exhaust perfumes the air during the competition because catalytic converters are stripped off the cars. Accidents, of course, are plentiful at a demolition derby, but strict rules help to ensure the safety of the drivers.

"It's not really a dangerous sport. There's a cage in the car. The cars are welded," said Airman Dunham. "I've gotten bruises, but I've never been hurt."

Rules for demolition derbies can vary with the race, however, rules often include that the gas tank must be replaced with a small two-to-three gallon tank, located behind the driver's seat. The tank must be shielded against impact. The muffler must be removed and the battery must be relocated to the floor on the passenger side. Also, the trunk, hood and doors must be secured with wire, chains or welds.

Airman Dunham's advice for military members who have non-traditional ambitions is, "Follow your dreams. Live every day like you are going to live tomorrow. Gotta have fun with everything."

Before



After

